

Introduction

This lesson helps students learn to identify and analyze the structural elements of poetry. In this way they come to understand and appreciate how poems are constructed and why they are effective.

There are a variety of activities from which to choose in this lesson. Each activity can be tailored to the reading level and educational needs of the class.

Intended Learning Outcomes (Understandings)

Grades 3-5:

1. Students will understand the basic elements of poetry, including rhyme, rhythm, simile, metaphor, and descriptive imagery.

Grade 5:

1. Students will understand the secondary elements of poetry, including alliteration, assonance, consonance, and onomatopoeia.

Intended Learning Outcomes (Skills)

Grades 3-5:

1. Students will be able to analyze poetry excerpts and identify examples of rhyme, rhythm, simile, metaphor, and descriptive imagery.

Grade 5:

1. Students will be able to analyze poetry excerpts and to identify examples of alliteration, assonance, consonance, and onomatopoeia.

Lesson Length

Music of the Words and Rhyme: 30 minutes

"Poetry Rap" – Rhythm: 30 minutes

Simile and Metaphor: 30 minutes

Descriptive Imagery: 30 minutes

Secondary Poetic Elements: 30 minutes

Teacher Preparation

Activities I – V

1. Review and be familiar with *Elements of Poetry: Definitions* on page 26.
2. Familiarize yourself with the structural elements of *Rain in Summer* on page 27.
3. Review and select activities. Gather materials and make copies as necessary.

Activity VI

1. Familiarize yourself with the structural elements of *The Slave in the Dismal Swamp* on page 31.

Materials

Activities I – V

1. *Elements of Poetry*
2. Copies of *Rain in Summer* for all students
3. Colored highlighters, markers, or colored pencils (at least three or four different colors for each student).
4. "Found objects" that make a sound when struck or scraped (pens, rulers, etc.)
5. Tape recorder and blank tape (optional)
6. *Simile and Metaphor Worksheet* for all students
7. Drawing paper and markers, colored pencils, or crayons

Activity VI

1. *The Slave in the Dismal Swamp* for all students
2. Colored highlighters, markers, or colored pencils

Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks Standards

English Language Arts:

- Reading and Literature Strand/Standard 10: Genre
Students will identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of the characteristics of different genres.
- Reading and Literature Strand/Standard 14: Poetry
Students will identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of themes, structure, elements of poetry and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding.
- Reading and Literature Strand/Learning Standard 15: Style and Language
Students will identify and analyze how an author's words appeal to the senses, create imagery, suggest mood, and set tone, and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding.

THE POET'S TOOLBOX ACTIVITIES

I. The Music of the Words

A. Distribute the excerpt from Longfellow's *Rain in Summer* (pages 27-28).

B. Explain that:

1. This is part of a longer poem that Longfellow wrote in 1844.
2. Like many poems, it is made up of sections called stanzas. There is a space between the stanzas. Ask students to locate the breaks between the stanzas of the poem.
3. Poets use special tools to make their poems work. These tools include rhyme, rhythm, metaphor, simile, and descriptive imagery.

II. Rhyme

A. Explain that Longfellow's poetry is sometimes described as lyrical or musical in part because of his skill using rhythm and rhyme.

B. Ask students to define rhyme. Discuss briefly. Ask students for examples of words that rhyme and put some of these examples on the board.

C. Distribute copies of *Rain in Summer*, and highlighters, markers or colored pencils to students.

1. Read the first stanza of *Rain in Summer* aloud (teacher and/or students).
2. Ask students to identify the pairs of rhymes in the stanza (*rain, lane; heat, street*).
3. Instruct students to highlight (or underline) *rain* and *lane* with one color and *heat* and *street* with a different color.
4. Repeat with the second and third stanzas (or ask students to find the rhymes in all the remaining stanzas themselves, underlining each set of rhyming words with a different color).

D. Read the entire excerpt aloud (teacher and/or students)

1. Ask students to look at the color patterns on their poems and note that they show that the rhyming pattern (rhyme scheme) changes in each stanza.
2. Discuss this question: What are some of the reasons Longfellow may have varied the rhyme patterns? *[To keep the poem from being predictable and boring. Like music, if poetry is too repetitive it loses its ability to surprise, move, or delight us.]*

III. A “POETRY RAP” – RHYTHM

A. Ask students to define *rhythm*.

B. Re-read the first stanza of *Rain in Summer* without rhythm. Try to avoid the obvious rhythmic cadence and skip over any appropriate pausing spots.

1. Ask students what they thought about your reading. Then discuss the qualities of rhythm using these questions:
 - a. Why is rhythm important to poetry? *[Establishes the lyrical and musical qualities of the poem (flow); Serves as a way of reinforcing images in the poem]*
 - b. What is one of the important purposes of the rhythm in *Rain in Summer*? *[Helps communicate the sense of the beating rain]*
2. Read (or ask a student to read) the first two stanzas of the poem, with a steady (but not too heavy) rhythm, including pauses. You may choose to read the first stanza and ask students to read subsequent ones.
 - a. Tell students that they are going to create a “Poetry Rap” which emphasizes the rhythm of the poem.
 - b. Select a small group of students to use pens, pencils, or other “found objects” to tap out the beat gently (imitating the steady sound of rain). Start the tapping first, then have someone read the stanzas again while the students continue tapping.

- c. Select another small group of students to clap whenever there is a pause in the poem. Ask the reader to read the stanzas again, and the clappers to clap during the pauses in the reading. Be sure that the reader keeps the pulse steady. Practice.
- d. Put it all together: Start the tapping first, then start the reader(s). Have the clappers clap during the pauses. Practice.

Optional: Record students performing the "Poetry Rap" and play it back for them.

IV. SIMILE AND METAPHOR

Note: The metaphor component of this activity may be too difficult for third graders. If your class is not ready for metaphor, we encourage you to focus on the simile portion of this activity.

A. Explain that students will be learning about simile and metaphor and that simile and metaphor are tools that help poets and other writers create wonderful images with their words. Similes and metaphors help readers feel what the poet is feeling.

1. Distribute the *Simile and Metaphor Worksheet* on pages 29 – 30.
2. Read aloud (or instruct students to read) the definitions and examples. Discuss as necessary. Instruct students to complete the similes and metaphors on the worksheet.
3. Review and discuss.

B. Identify the similes and metaphors in *Rain in Summer* –

Younger students:

1. Read **STANZAS TWO, THREE, and SIX** aloud.
2. Ask students to raise their hands when they hear a simile. Remind them that they should listen for the words "like" or "as," which signal that a simile is being used.

**Similes
from Rain
in Spring:**

Stanza Two:

*"How it clatters along the roofs,
Like the tramp of hoofs!"*

Stanza Three:

*"And swift and wide, With a muddy tide,
Like a river down the gutter roars"*

Stanza Six:

*"In the country, on every side, Where far and
wide, Like a leopard's tawny and spotted hide,
Stretches the plain,"*

3. Instruct students to find at least one of the similes you read in their copy of the poem, and to circle the simile using a colored marker.
4. Read **STANZA FIVE** and see if students can identify either the metaphor that Longfellow uses for the group of boys going down the street:

*"And down the wet streets
Sail their mimic fleets"*

OR for water pouring down the street

*"Till the treacherous pool Ingulfs them
in its whirling and turbulent ocean"*

5. Instruct students to circle one of the metaphors in their copy of the poem.

Older Students:

1. Divide students into pairs or small groups.
2. Instruct students to read the poem and find and circle similes and metaphors in the poem. Use one color for similes and another for metaphors. *See above instructions for younger children for examples of similes and metaphors in the poem.*

V. DESCRIPTIVE IMAGERY

- A. Explain that when a poet uses words to paint a vivid picture in our imaginations, we call this writing tool “descriptive imagery.” Longfellow used a great deal of descriptive imagery, and it is often so graphic that you can almost see, hear, smell, or feel what he’s writing about.
- B. Discuss the descriptive imagery in *Rain in Summer*. Ask students to give examples of descriptive images Longfellow used to help us get a feeling for what is happening in the poem. List these on the board. Prompt students to include as many images as possible.
- C. Distribute drawing materials. Ask students to illustrate the poem, including at least three of the descriptive images identified.

VI. SECONDARY POETIC ELEMENTS – ALLITERATION, ASSONANCE, CONSONANCE, AND ONOMATOPOEIA

- A. Define alliteration and give examples. Ask students to make up more examples and write some of these on the board. Repeat with assonance, consonance, and onomatopoeia.
- B. Distribute *The Slave in the Dismal Swamp* (pages 31 – 32).
 - 1. Have individual students read sections of the poem aloud.
 - 2. After each section is read, check for words that students may not understand, and have students define these words (use a dictionary, if necessary). Write the words and their definitions on the board.
 - 3. Remind students about alliteration. Instruct students to underline examples of alliteration in the poem with a colored marker, pencil or highlighter.

**Samples of
alliteration:**

“In bulrush and in brake”

“Is spotted like the snake”

“Where hardly a human foot could pass,
or a human heart would dare”

“Fell, like a flail”

4. Instruct students to do the same for assonance, consonance, and onomatopoeia, using a different color for each.

Examples of Assonance : "rank and tangled grass;"
 "on his forehead he bore;"
 "livery of disgrace"

Examples of Consonance : "Fell, like a flail;"
 "wild birds filled"

Example of Onomatopoeia: "horse's tramp"

5. Discuss how these elements contribute to the musical qualities of the poem and help the poet express mood and feeling.

Optional: Use this poem as an opportunity to discuss slavery and abolition in the early and mid-nineteenth century.

Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks Standards

English Language Arts:

- Reading and Literature Strand/Standard 10: Genre
Students will identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of the characteristics of different genres.
- Reading and Literature Strand/Standard 14: Poetry
Students will identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of themes, structure, elements of poetry and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding.
- Reading and Literature Strand/Learning Standard 15: Style and Language
Students will identify and analyze how an author's words appeal to the senses, create imagery, suggest mood, and set tone, and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding.



ELEMENTS OF POETRY: DEFINITIONS

Alliteration – Two or more words in a line of poetry that begin with the same initial sound.

Example: Laughing Liza's lovely lilies lit the night skies white.

Assonance – Repeating vowel sounds without repeating consonants. In poetry, often used as an alternative to rhyme.

Example: stony, stormy, holy

Consonance – Repeating consonants without repeating vowels. Consonance gives melody to verse.

Example: back, luck, rock, stick

Descriptive imagery – Vivid descriptions which convey strong images.

Example: She ran like fire across a field of dry prairie grass.

Metaphor – The transfer of identity from an object that a word usually describes to another object it describes by comparison.

Example: "A sudden rush from the stairway, A sudden raid from the hall! By three doors left unguarded, They enter my castle wall!" (The "castle wall" is Longfellow's study.)

Onomatopoeia – A word that imitates the sound made by the thing being described.

Example: boom, crash, cuckoo

Rhyme – When words, particularly the endings, sound alike.

Example: fine and mine; day and stay; hear and Revere

Rhythm – A metered flow of syllables, consonants, breathing, or pauses.

Example: "Listen my children and you shall hear of the midnight ride of Paul Revere."

Simile – A figure of speech in which two unlike things are compared or contrasted using the words *like* or *as*.

Example: He whispered softly like wind through the trees.

An excerpt from

RAIN IN SUMMER

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1844

How beautiful is the rain!

After the dust and heat,

In the broad and fiery street,

In the narrow lane,

How beautiful is the rain!

How it clatters along the roofs,

Like the ramp of hoofs!

How it gushes and struggles out

From the throat of the overflowing spout!

Across the window- pane

It pours and pours;

And swift and wide,

With a muddy tide,

Like a river down the gutter roars

The rain, the welcome rain!

The sick man from his chamber looks
At the twisted brooks;
He can feel the cool
Breath of each little pool;
His fevered brain
Grows calm again,
And he breathes a blessing on the rain.

From the neighboring school
Come the boys,
With more than their wonted noise
And commotion;
And down the wet streets
Sail their mimic fleets,
Till the treacherous pool
Ingulfs them in its whirling
And turbulent ocean.

In the country, on every side,
Where far and wide,
Like a leopard's tawny and spotted hide,
Stretches the plain,
To the dry grass and the drier grain
How welcome is the rain!

SIMILE and METAPHOR WORKSHEET

Definitions and Examples:

Similes and *metaphors* are imaginative and interesting ways to compare two things that are quite different. The most important difference between a simile and a metaphor is that a simile *always* uses either the word “like” or the word “as.”

Here is an example of a simile:

The girl ran like fire across a field of dry prairie grass.

In this simile, the girl’s running is being compared to fire traveling across a field of dry grass. We know she was running fast, because we know that fire travels quickly through dry grass. We can easily imagine the fire moving through the dry field and the girl running.

Here is an example of a metaphor from Longfellow’s poem *The Children’s Hour*:

“They climb up into my turret, o’er the arms and back of my chair.”

In this metaphor, Longfellow is comparing his chair to a turret (tower) in a castle. We are able to imagine his three daughters circling and climbing the chair as if they are walking up a circular staircase to the top of a tower.

Make your own similes by completing these sentences:

The mother whispered softly like _____

The load of bricks hit the ground like _____

The river rushes by as fast as _____

The man carried a sack of grain that was as heavy as _____

Make your own metaphors by finding something imaginative and descriptive to compare with these phrases:

A big chair _____

The feel of soft drizzle _____

The sound of students at recess _____

The smell of baking cookies _____

The sound of a ringing bell _____

THE SLAVE IN THE DISMAL SWAMP

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1842

Longfellow felt very strongly that slavery should be abolished. He published *Poems on Slavery*, a small book of poems about the evils of slavery in 1842, long before the Civil War. This poem is from that collection.

In dark fens of the Dismal Swamp
The hunted Negro lay;
He saw the fire of the midnight camp,
And heard at times a horse's tramp,
And a bloodhound's distant bay.

Where the will- o' - the wisps and glowworms shine,
In bulrush and in brake;
Where the waving mosses shroud the pine,
And the cedar grows, and the poisonous vine
Is spotted like the snake;

Where hardly a human foot could pass,
Or a human heart would dare,
On the quaking turf of the green morass
He crouched in the rank and tangled grass,
Like a wild beast in his lair.

A poor old slave, infirm and lame;
Great scars deformed his face;
On his forehead he bore the brand of shame,
And the rags, that hid his mangled frame,
Were the livery of disgrace.

All things above were bright and fair;
All things were glad and free;
Lithe squirrels darted here and there,
And wild birds filled the echoing air
With songs of liberty!

On him alone was the doom of pain,
From the morning of his birth;
On him alone the curse of Cain
Fell, like a flail on the garnered grain,
And struck him to the earth!